

CREEPING RED FESCUE

Festuca rubra L. ssp. *arenaria*
(Osbeck) F. Aresch.
plant symbol = FERUA3

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program

Alternate Names
red fescue

Uses

Erosion control: Creeping red fescue has a wide range when used for erosion control along roads and highways; cuts, fills, and other disturbed areas; and for stream and channel bank stabilization.

Recreation and beautification: Creeping red fescue makes excellent lawns, golf greens and turf for ground cover in landscaping. It is particularly important in shaded locations and on sandy soils.

Wildlife: This fescue is very valuable as ground cover in wildlife habitat conservation, especially when grown in combination with taller species used for bird nesting sites.

Livestock: In general, creeping red fescue has not been very important as forage, due to low palatability and productivity. While it withstands close grazing, it tends to become unpalatable if allowed to grow.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Festuca rubra ssp. *arenaria*, creeping red fescue, is a perennial with short rootstalks and few to many stems that are usually reddish at the base and 6 to 36 inches high, with smooth leaves and sheaths. The leaves are enfolding and narrow, more or less hairy, and shorter than the stems. Its seedhead is a dark green, reddish, or waxy cluster, 2 to 5 inches long, that has erect or ascending branches and is initially open but becomes contracted. Flower spikelets are 3, 8, or 10-flowered;

the seed covering is indistinctly nerved, with a bristle half or less as long.

Adaptation and Distribution

Creeping red fescue is adapted to gravelly, calcareous soils in cool, temperate climates. It requires more moisture than hard or sheep fescue, and prefers a pH of 5.5 to 6.5 but can survive considerable acidity. It can be grown as a dryland cover crop in coastal regions or other areas with average annual precipitation greater than 18 inches. Elsewhere, it will produce better yields if grown under irrigation. Creeping red fescue is climatically adapted to all of the major land resource regions that receive adequate moisture and have well-drained soils. It thrives in sun or shade.

Creeping red fescue is distributed in the West. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

Creeping red fescue is best seeded on a firm, weed-free, well-prepared seedbed following fertilization of the soil. Broadcasting on a freshly disturbed site is effective in cases where a proper seedbed cannot be prepared. The grass is usually seeded in a mixture with other species selected according to the purpose. Lawn seedings include 2 pounds per 1,000 square feet in a mixture with bentgrass or Kentucky bluegrass depending on whether the application is intended, respectively, for a moist coastal site or the drier interior. Shallow seeding with a drill is preferred for many seedings. Stabilization projects are seeded at rates of 12 to 18 pounds per acre. On sand dunes, drill at 6 pounds per acre into a stand of beachgrass after the sand surface is stilled. Lawn or turf areas and critical areas, which are broadcast seeded, are mulched for erosion control and to retain soil moisture during establishment.

A complete fertilizer should be applied at the time of establishment, or else fertilize according to soil test needs. Fertilizer should provide nitrogen, phosphate and potassium.

Management

Newly seeded areas require protection from heavy trampling or grazing for one year or until the stand is well established. Lawn areas will develop more rapidly if fertilized and irrigated. Weed control by clipping or the use of selective herbicides is desirable and may be necessary until full cover is established. For optimal appearance and effective weed control,

stubble height for lawns and other turf areas should not exceed 2 inches after clipping or mowing.

Erosion control seedings and sand dune areas need fertilizer application and protection from overuse, but do not normally require weed control. Fescue is shade tolerant and will usually establish even under a canopy of vegetation.

Pests and Potential Problems

There are no serious pests of creeping red fescue.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

There are no particular cultivars recommended for conservation use. Creeping red fescue can be purchased at most commercial seed sources.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:

USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS <<http://plants.usda.gov>> and Plant Materials Program Web sites <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>.

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